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“WHERE THE YOUNG CHILD WAS”

BY JOHN H. FINLEY

DISCOVERERS have had in turn the persecution, the recognition, and finally the praise of the world: Persecution, because they have disturbed its beliefs, its conventions or the prerogatives of the few,—from the days of Prometheus, the fire-bringer, to the days of Darwin, the evolutionist; recognition, beginning usually with the devotion of a little circle of disciples—as of The Twelve; and widening in due time to praise, that reaches often wherever the history of mankind is read. These discoverers have girded up their loins like a man and answered correctly most of the questions which the Lord put out of the whirlwind to Job, who in his ignorance could but abhor himself, and call himself vile. They have not only “perceived the breadth of the earth”, but they have actually put a girdle about it and in one-thousandth of the forty minutes of Ariel’s fancy; they have found the father of the rain and the dew and the mother of the ice and hoary frost. They have even ascended to the sky and loosed the bands of Orion by measuring Betelgeuse, and, going in the direction of the infinitesimal, have tracked force into the heart of the invisible atom.

But in this westward Odyssean voyage in discovery of the unknown, there has been much lost that was once known; some of the precious past has been buried under the eager and ever westward-looking present. So have come, in the wake of the discoverers, the “recoverers”; yet not in their wake, as gleaners, for the recoverers are the eastward-facing adventurers. They have gone back over the course of Empire, back over the hard way of science, back over the path of Christendom to the places where the Wise Men of old saw the Star which came and stood over “where the young Child was” who gave Christendom its name and history, its date for reckoning all events in the universe.

At this season, we remember particularly those who have "recovered" the little land which embraces holy places of three great faiths and the most holy places of two of these. First among these recoverers, of course, is he who has delivered the land itself from the hand of the Turk and his usually oppressive, often cruel and always unenlightened rule—General Allenby, whose name should be written in fame's list along with those early recoverers, Joshua and Deborah and David. He would not allow himself to be called a Crusader, though his achievement deserves more even than is written in epic praise of the early Crusaders in Tasso's *Jerusalem Delivered*.

But Lord Allenby's recovery of the land is, after all, as is true of every discovery, of value only if it be put to some higher human uses. It will not be enough that the few hundred thousand people who live there—about as many as there are in Cleveland, Ohio, or in Baltimore, Maryland, or in St. Louis, Missouri—shall live in greater freedom, comfort and happiness. It will not be enough that the desert parts again blossom as the rose, and become as fruitful as gardens of Solomon. It would not be a satisfying recovery even if the quiet cities should be developed into industrial centers by the western sons of Tubal Cain (the ancient "forger of every cutting instrument of brass and iron"), with their smoking chimneys and mills whose noise would be heard above the sound of the grinding of millstones.

The land will be fully recovered only if its spiritual values be exploited for all nations and peoples. If every man, woman and child, whose religion traces its origin from or its way through that land, were to become a stockholder in the "glorious company of the apostles", and purchase even an infinitesimal material interest in that land, it would quicken their spiritual interest in that which has come out of it. If they could recover the glory which enhaloed the land in childhood, like the light of the Shechinah, for millions of them it would make the place "where the Child was" a real sanctuary again for the broken world. For the world must go all the way back to religion for its own recovery. We must, as Amiel said, continue to adore that which dwells beyond the seeing and hearing even of science, for when adoration ceases and the desire of the mind fails, the life of the

world shrinks to the visible, the audible and the palpable, whose walls become a tomb. Only faith finds a satisfying end for the journey of man, begun when he first saw a Star in the East and knelt in worship. A few days ago, there was uncovered in a village just across the plain of Jezreel from Nazareth—less than thirty miles away—the marble sarcophagus of a cousin of Herod the Great, who was no doubt alive when the Child was born Whom Herod sought to destroy. This is said to be the only contemporary record so far found of that eventful day. It is the tomb of one who, if he did not join in the slaughter of the innocents, did not go to worship at Bethlehem, with the Wise Men and the Shepherds.

The Western Wise Men of science need to take their occidental gifts back to the same place to which the Wise Men came from the East. The adoration of these Western Magi would be the worshipful offering by the chemist, the biologist, the physicist, of their discoveries for the recovery and advancement of that doctrine and practice of human brotherhood announced on one of the hills of Galilee.

I passed that hill in the dawn of a day immediately after the Battle of Armageddon in the autumn of 1918. The land was as the house in the parable from which the unclean spirit had been driven forth. I thought, as I then wrote, that it was the beginning of the thousand years of peace. The house has since been swept and garnished, but if it be not filled with the spirit that breathed in the Sermon on the Mount, the unclean spirit will find its way back, bringing its seven companions with it. And the last state of that house will be worse than the first. Lest that fate come upon this little land, whatever may befall the rest of Western Asia that seems about to come again under the unrestrained rule of the Turk, the people of the nations of Christendom should unite to keep it a holy place, into which nothing that defileth or maketh a lie or worketh an abomination shall enter—a place into which the nations shall bring their glory and honor, a spiritual home not for any one people or race or nation, but for all whose faith looks toward Bethlehem, or whose windows open toward Jerusalem, or whose pilgrim thoughts find their way to the Dome of the Rock.

There is need of a new Crusade, not of Christian against Jew or Moslem for the recovery of the Holy Land, but of Christian, Jew and Moslem united against the material forces that would make man forget the spiritual ends of existence, for the recovery of faith—of that for which this land is a symbol.

In our Western civilization, we have daily traveled farther from the East, like the Youth of Wordsworth's ode journeying into Manhood; but in so doing we have again reached the East, the place where the Star was seen, that came and stood over "where the Young Child was". It is now a time for recovering the vision splendid, which for so many seems to be dying away into the light of common day.

JOHN H. FINLEY.